

# THE SAD FISH

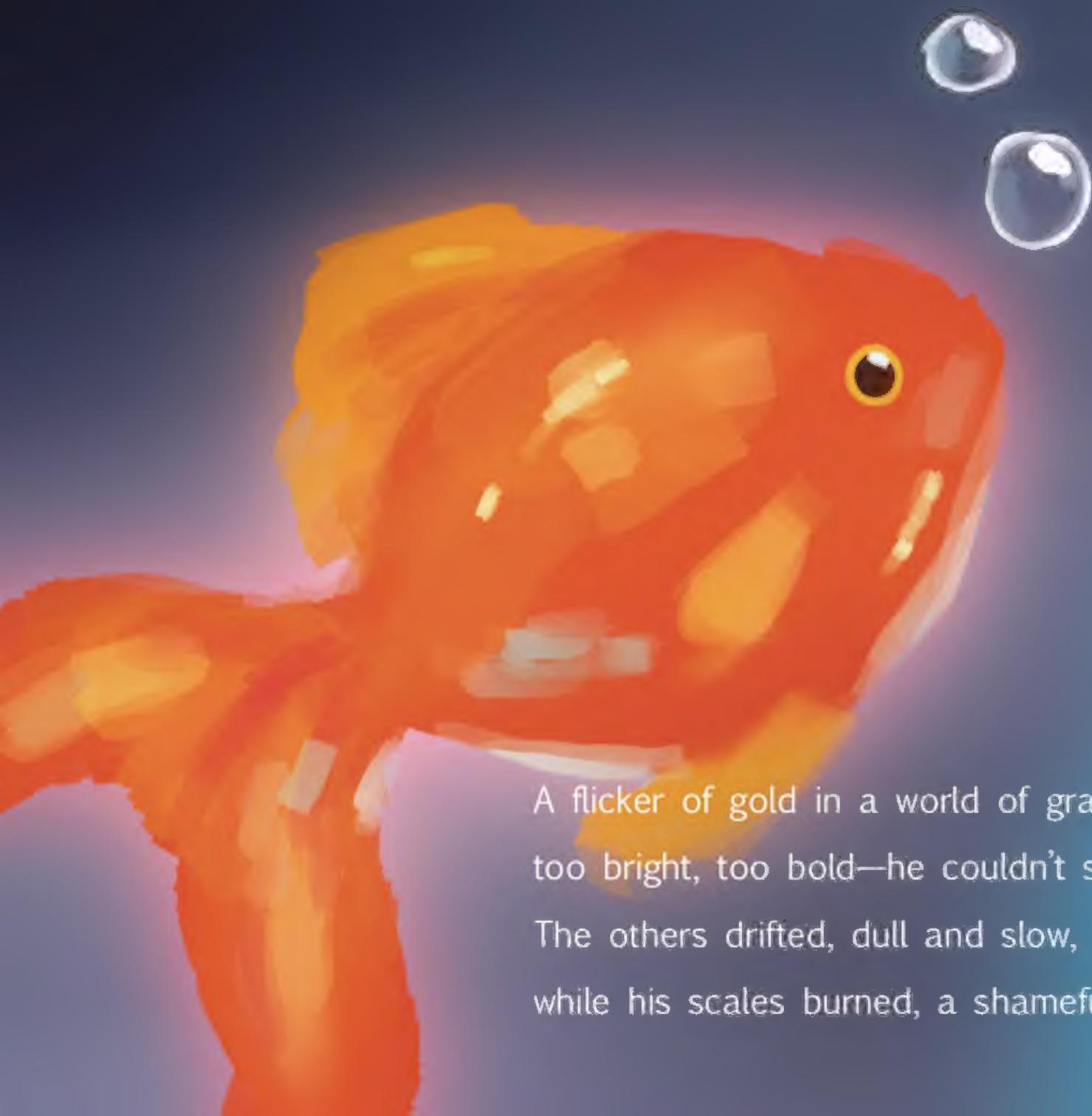
Written and illustrated by Seoyoon Lee



Once there was a sad orange fish,  
doomed to circle, doomed to swish  
in a tank by the windowsill  
where the world stayed pale and still



Bleak, the abandoned aquarium seemed,  
everyone had lost their dreams.  
Sitting in the solemn room,  
all that he could feel was gloom.



A flicker of gold in a world of gray,  
too bright, too bold—he couldn't stay.

The others drifted, dull and slow,  
while his scales burned, a shameful glow.

He longed to see the sky's true blue,  
not walls of artificial hue.  
Yet all the others met his plea  
with eye rolls full of apathy.

Then one day, soft as dew,  
a new face hovered into view.

A girl whose eyes shone bright and true,  
like sunbeams piercing water blue.

She was quiet, she was kind,  
a worn-out sketchbook tucked behind,  
each stroke tracing the universe,  
her landscapes vast in hues diverse.



She would shine unlike his world,  
danced with light and swirled and twirled.  
Her voice a spark, his heart aglow,  
“I’ll take you where the wild streams flow.”

The fish was eager to proclaim  
the wonders past the glassy frame.  
“I’m going outside! How cool is that?”  
But his friends just laughed where they sat.



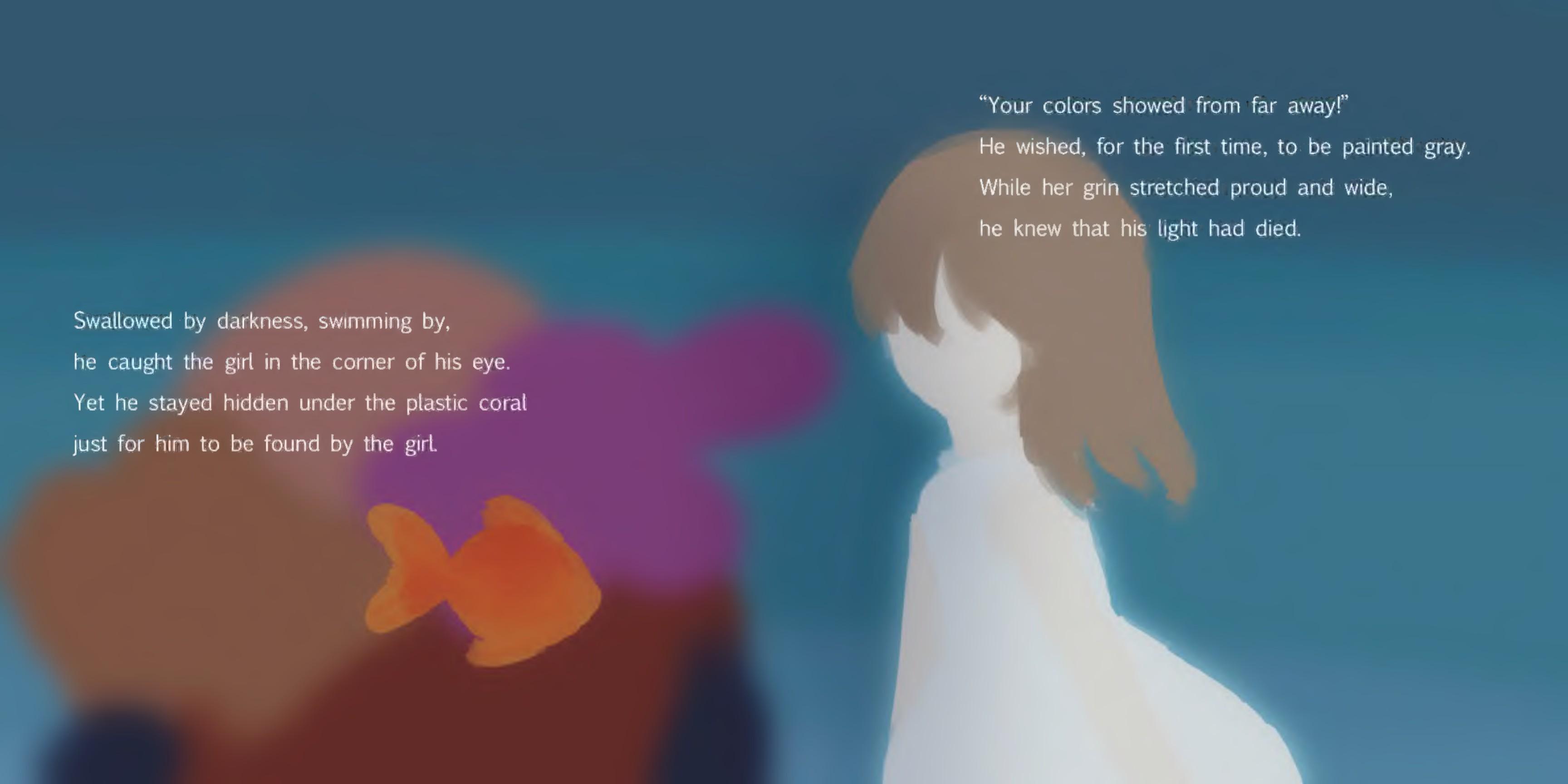
"What do you mean outside?" they sneered,  
"It's safe right here!" The sad fish feared  
their mocking words. "But don't you see  
what's beyond these walls?" They scoffed, "Just be."

The fish spiraled deep, a sinking weight,

just down, down, down, straight.

He tucked himself where none could pry,

Did he belong? Questions choked his mind.

A girl with long brown hair tied back in a ponytail is swimming in the ocean. She is wearing a white, one-piece swimsuit. The water is a deep blue, and there are some orange and yellow fish swimming around her. The background is a clear blue sky.

Swallowed by darkness, swimming by,  
he caught the girl in the corner of his eye.  
Yet he stayed hidden under the plastic coral  
just for him to be found by the girl.

“Your colors showed from far away!”

He wished, for the first time, to be painted gray.  
While her grin stretched proud and wide,  
he knew that his light had died.





She turned the sketchbook's pages slow,  
paused, flipped it over, and let it show.  
It was the two swimming in a beautiful river.  
“Hey, that could be us,” she smiled and whispered.



The fish's eyes sparkled with delight  
and trust, now assured he was right.  
His fins stirred not to flee from his flaws  
but to rise as the fish he was.



The water trembled, scooped up fast,  
where startled silence sighed at last.

A bubble of freedom in both her hands,  
she slipped through doors to unknown lands.

She stepped on rocks and jumped on leaves,  
reaching a river with whispering reeds.  
Her smile gentle and voice hushed,  
she tipped the bowl, and water rushed.



The orange fish darted, swift and bright,  
a flash of fire in the water's light.  
No walls to hold him, sadness to bear,  
Only the water, the sky, the air.

Then he realized, this was home—  
no longer lost, no more alone.  
The happy fish looked up at the girl,  
showed his "thank you" with a birl.

They realized, as they walked away,



both were finally free that day.



